



News Release

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Samish Bay shellfish harvest closed due to high levels of fecal bacteria

Second closure means the area will stay on the "conditionally approved list"

OLYMPIA — For the second time this spring, most of Samish Bay has been closed to shellfish harvesting due to high levels of fecal coliform bacteria entering the bay from the Samish River. When tests show the bacteria are high, Samish Bay shellfish harvesting is closed by the state Department of Health to prevent contaminated shellfish from being harvested and sold.

"We see the highest levels of fecal bacteria in the river during spring rains," said Jerrod Davis, director of the Office of Shellfish and Water Protection. "Although the steps taken by landowners are improving water quality, the closures show there's more work to be done."

Skagit County, Skagit Conservation District, the Puget Sound Partnership, the Departments of Ecology and Agriculture continue working with landowners to fix pollution problems.

Each year between March and June, the Department of Health reviews closures and test results from the area to determine if the 4,000 acres of Samish Bay commercial shellfish beds will remain "Conditionally Approved" or if they can return to "Approved" classification. This second closure confirms that the area will remain "Conditionally Approved."

The conditionally approved classification means that the area must be closed temporarily because of intermittent pollution events. Whenever conditions like rapid river rise or rainstorms indicate a possible increase in pollution, water testing is done and the results determine if the area has to remain closed or is safe to resume shellfish harvesting.

The Office of Shellfish and Water Protection's goal is to make sure that shellfish harvested in our state waters are safe to eat. It uses national water quality standards to classify commercial shellfish harvesting areas in Washington.

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